The Obligations Muslims Owe to the Qur'an

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FOREWORD

This article, which appeared in Urdu under the title *Musalmanon per Qur'an-e-Majeed Kay Huqooq,* is based on two addresses delivered by Dr. Israr Ahmad to the Congregations in Jami'ah Khazra, Samanabad (Lahore) on two consecutive Fridays in January 1968, at a time when the Muslims of Pakistan were celebrating the 1400th anniversary of the commencement of the Revelation of the Holy Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (SAW). During the following month, speeches on similar topics were delivered by Dr. Israr Ahmad at the Ajmal Bagh College, Sadiqabad, Ta'meer-e-Millat High School, Sukkur, and Government College, Jhang. The text of these addresses and speeches was edited and published in the monthly *Meesaq* in its May and June issues of the same year. In November 1969, it appeared in the form of a booklet under the title mentioned above, and in July 1972 its second edition of ten thousand copies was published by the Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an, Lahore.

Musalmanon per Qur'an-e-Majeed Kay Huqooq is an impassioned call to the Muslims "to return to the Qur'an," to rededicate themselves to its study, and make it the sole guide for their lives. Considering the profound purpose behind the book, I felt that it should be rendered into English for the benefit of our English-reading public as well as for approaching the minds of the people abroad. Accordingly, I was thinking of seeking Dr. Israr Sahib's permission for the translation of the book when, one day, to my delightful surprise he himself suggested that I should translate the *Huquq* — that being the brief and popular sobriquet of this book. Hence the translation now appears under the title *The Obligations Muslims Owe to the Qur'an*.

This translation has already been published in the form of an article by the All Pakistan Islamic Education Congress in a recent issue of their journal *Islamic Education* under the title: "What Does the Qur'an Demand from its Followers?" and now, through their courtesy and cooperation, it is reappearing under a new title in the form of a regular booklet. I pray that it may prove helpful in the fulfillment of the great purpose which Dr. Israr Ahmad, the author of the original book, has set before himself and which he is pursuing with a single-minded devotion, Ameen.

MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM

The Obligations Muslims Owe to the Qur'an

During the last decade (i.e., the sixties), international *qir'aat* competitions have become a regular feature in the Muslim World. These competitions, in which well-known *qura'* from different countries have been participating to display their remarkable talents for the recitation of the Qur'an, have served a number of purposes. The large audiences who have been listening spell-bound to the recitations of the world-famous *qura'* have always been moved by the unique melody, eloquence, and grandeur of the Qur'anic diction. This may have, temporarily, strengthened their belief in the Divine origin of the Qur'an. Moreover, these competitions have popularized *tajweed* (i.e., the art of reciting the Qur'an with correct pronunciation) in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan. The Muslim children in these countries today can recite the Holy Book with much better accent and intonation than they could possibly do a few years ago.

Without intending to minimize the importance of reciting the Qur'an correctly, one might ask the question: Have these competitions helped bridge the gulf that yawns between us and the Qur'an today? Or, have they established a real contact between us and the book of Allah (SWT)? The answer to these questions is: "No."

Unfortunately, the great objective of establishing a real contact between us and the Qur'an has not been achieved even by the different religious seminars and symposia which have been held in our country and elsewhere during the recent years. The savants and scholars who participated in the discussions at these conferences and colloquia have generally dwelt at such topics as the greatness of the Qur'an, its beauties and marvels etc., but no attempt has been made to consider the fundamental questions: What are our obligations towards the Qur'an? And how can we discharge these obligations? So far as the glory and greatness of the Qur'an is concerned, we believe it is indescribable and its adequate comprehension is beyond the reach of human mind. It is best known to the Lord of the heavens and the earth Whose word it is, or to His blessed Messenger (SAW) to whom it was revealed.[1]

Therefore, instead of making a presumptuous attempt at describing its unique merits, the most pertinent thing for us to do is that we should clearly understand our duties and responsibilities towards the Qur'an and then see whether or not we are conscientiously fulfilling these duties and responsibilities. If we find that we are not doing so, we should seriously think about the line of action we should adopt for their fulfillment; and then adopt the line without any further delay because our very salvation depends on our efforts in this direction. Paying pompous compliments to the Qur'an will not be enough and it cannot be a substitute for actually discharging our obligations towards the Holy Book.

Now what are these obligations? Or, in other words, what does the Qur'an demand of us?

The Qur'an makes five demands of every Muslim. Put in a simple language, these demands are as follows:

A Muslim is required:

1. to believe in the Qur'an;
2. to read it;

[1] The actual appreciation of the exalted status of Holy Qur'an is beyond the reach of human intellect and imagination, so much so that the Qur'an itself uses a similitude to give us an approximate idea of its own greatness. Almighty Allah (SWT) says: "Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rent asunder by the fear of Allah. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect." (Al-Hashr 59:21)

3. to understand it;
4. to act upon its teachings; and
5. to convey its message and teachings to others.

We will now ponder over these demands or obligations in some depth along with a brief explanation of the terms in which they have been expressed in the Qur'an itself, so that besides getting a clear idea of his duties towards the Qur'an, the reader may also become familiar with basic Qur'anic terminology.

I

Iman Wa Ta'zeem

(Belief in the Divine origin of the Qur'an and an attitude of reverence towards it)

The Qur'anic term for belief in a spiritual reality is *Iman* (faith) which has two phases: *Iqrar bil-lisan* (verbal profession) and *tasdiq bil-qalb* (heart-felt conviction). A verbal profession of a belief in the spiritual realities upheld by Islam is the condition of a person's admittance into the fold of this religion, but true faith will emerge only when that belief deepens into a strong inward conviction.

Now what is meant by having faith in the Qur'an? It means that one should, in the first instance, verbally profess that the Qur'an is the Word of Allah (SWT) that was revealed by Him through His chosen angel Jibra'eel (AS), to the last of His messengers, Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Having made this profession, a person will be accepted as a member of the Muslim community, although he may not have yet attained true faith. It is only when he comes to cherish this belief with a deep, inward conviction that the light of true faith will illumine his heart. Then he will find his heart to be full of reverence for the Holy Book. As his faith becomes stronger and stronger, his mind will come more and more under the spell of the Qur'an, and his feeling of reverence for it will become deeper and deeper. Thus faith and reverence go together. We learn from the study of the Qur'an that the first individual to believe in this Revealed Book was none other than the Prophet (SAW) himself who was followed by his Companions (RAA).

> The Messenger believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, as well as the believers…. (Al-Baqarah 2:285)

Their belief was a deep inward conviction that the Qur'an was *kalam Allah* (the Word of God). This conviction developed in them a reverential attitude towards the Qur'an and created in their hearts an unbounded love and devotion for it. It was for this reason that the Holy Prophet (SAW) used to wait anxiously for the Revelation to come, that he would get impatient if it was temporarily suspended, and when it was resumed he would try to memorize it with utmost avidity and eagerness, so much so that Allah (SWT), out of love and affection for his Messenger (SAW), forbade him to be impatient in this regard with the following instructions:

> …do not be in haste for the Qur'an…. (Taha 20:114)

> And do not move your tongue quickly (in trying to memorize the Revelation) to make haste therewith. (Al-Qiyamah 75:16).

Once at an early stage, the continuity in the process of Qur'anic revelation was interrupted for an unusually long period. It is reported that this interruption caused the Holy Prophet (SAW) so much anguish and distress that he would often think of throwing himself down

from a mountain. So deep was his devotion for the Qur'an that he would spend the greater part of the night in prayer and recitation. He would stand reciting the Qur'an for long hours until his feet would get swollen. His Companions (RAA) were also equally enamored of the Holy Book and would recite it for long hours at night. Many of them had made it a point to go through the whole Qur'an once a week. The Holy Prophet (SAW), though himself the recipient of the Qur'anic Revelation, often asked his Companions (RAA) to recite the Qur'an to him and would be moved to tears by the intensity of feelings roused in his heart.

Obviously, the reason why the Companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) came to entertain such a deep love and reverence for the Qur'an in their hearts, and regarded it with so much reverence, was that their belief in the Qur'an being a Revelation from the Almighty had reached the highest stage of conviction — a stage at which a reality is accepted as an Absolute Truth. Now let us examine the condition of our faith in the Qur'an. We do profess that the Qur'an is a Divine revelation and, indeed, we should be thankful to the Almighty that He has included us among those who hold this belief about His Book, but most of us are not inwardly convinced of its being the Word of Allah (SWT), a Revelation from the Creator of the heavens and the earth. This is the real cause of our estrangement from, and indifference to the Qur'an. Even a casual introspection and self-examination will prove that our hearts are devoid of the true belief in the Qur'an and, instead of harboring true faith, they have become the dwellings of doubts and misgivings. My fellow Muslims might resent this plain speaking on my part; nevertheless, it is a fact that we Muslims woefully lack a staunch faith in the Divine origin of the Qur'an. The state of doubt and uncertainty in which we find ourselves today has been described in the Qur'an in the following words:

> …truly, those who have inherited the Book after them are in suspicious (disquieting) doubt concerning it. (Al-Shura 42:14)

This lack of faith is the reason why we neither find any reverence for the Qur'an in our hearts, nor feel inclined to study it, nor evince any interest in pondering over its meaning, nor ever think of seeking its guidance in conducting our lives. As long as we do not make up this dreadful deficiency, no useful purpose will be served by any amount of religious instruction.

The first and foremost duty of every Muslim, therefore, is to check his belief in the Qur'an to see whether his belief in the Qur'an being a sacred and heavenly book is a mere dogma which has nothing to do with his practical life, or whether he is really convinced of its being a Word of Allah (SWT) which has been vouchsafed to mankind to seek guidance from it and make it a practical code of life. If we hold this conviction, we may have reason to be satisfied and be thankful to Allah (SWT), but if not — which unfortunately is the case with a vast majority — we should first of all make up this deficiency in our faith, because the fulfillment of our other obligations to the Qur'an is dependent upon this very conviction.

It may be asked as to how can this deficiency be made up. Obviously, the easiest and the most effective way to acquire and augment faith is to move in the society of godly persons whose hearts are illumined by the light of true faith. The Companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) owed their unique faith to the inspiring influence of their Master (SAW), who himself was an embodiment of faith and certitude. After the death of the Holy Prophet (SAW), one can never dream of attaining the same degree of faith as the Companions (RAA) had attained on account of his physical presence among them, still the method of improving and perfecting faith in the company of the pious will be followed with immense advantage even today; so, we need to turn to the pious among us for continually refreshing our faith. So far as the pious are concerned, they, in their turn, will find the greatest source of the light of faith in the Holy Qur'an itself. They will also make a careful study of the biographies of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his Companions (RAA) so that they may be able to enjoy an intellectual and spiritual companionship of the

Messenger of Allah (SAW) and his Companions (RAA). As regards the faith in the Qur'an and its growth, we have to depend upon one source only and that is the Holy Qur'an itself.

As we shall later on discuss this point in some detail, *Iman* (or faith), in reality, is not something that can be planted in us from outside. It is an embodiment of fundamental truths that continually flash through our inner being and are caught and reflected by our heart. We can say that the human heart is a wonderful mirror that automatically catches and reflects the light of those universal truths that constitute *Iman*. What happens is that sometimes the surface of this mirror gets blurred under the effect of wrong environment and education and fails to catch and reflect the inner light of *Iman*. To polish this mirror so that it may clearly reflect man's inner light, Allah (SWT), out of His benevolence to mankind, has revealed His Word, urging us to discern the light inside ourselves and reminding us of the truths which are the intuitive apprehensions of our primordial nature.

> An insight and reminder (of the truths ingrained in human nature) for every servant who turns to Allah in repentance. (Qaf 50:8)

If the Holy Book is studied and its meanings are pondered over in a genuine quest for truth, all the veils of darkness are lifted, one after another, and our inner self is illumined by the light of faith. After the heart's mirror has once been rendered capable of clearly reflecting the light of faith, we shall still have to revert to the Qur'an whenever we find that its shining surface is becoming dull and hazy under the effect of worldly temptations. The following tradition, narrated on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Umar (RAA) refers to the polishing effect of the Qur'an on the mirror of the heart:

> The Holy Prophet (SAW) once remarked: "Surely, these hearts get rusted as iron gets rusted in water." He was asked how the heart's rust could be rubbed off. He replied: "By frequent remembrance of death and the recitation of the Qur'an." (Narrated by Bayhaqi)

The crux of the matter is that if our belief in the Divine origin of the Qur'an remains a mere dogma, it will not bring about any change in our present conditions and in our attitude of cold indifference towards the Qur'an. If we wish to do justice to the Qur'an and fulfill the demands it makes from us, we should first of all have the deep inner conviction that the Qur'an is, indeed, the last and final Message of Allah (SWT) delivered to the last of His messengers for the guidance of mankind. As soon as we come to have this conviction, our attitude towards the Qur'an will undergo a radical change. As soon as we realize that it is a Revelation from our Lord, our Creator, that Most Exalted Being Whose slightest apprehension transcends the bounds of our imagination,[2] our thinking will be completely revolutionized. We shall then feel that the Qur'an is the greatest blessing for us under the sun. Its recitation will sustain and nourish our souls, and contemplation over its meanings will chasten our hearts and enlighten our minds. From that point onwards, we shall never feel satiated with its study; and even after dedicating the best powers of our mind and intellect to its service, and having devoted our whole life to meditation over its meanings, we shall feel that we have not been able to do justice to the Glorious Qur'an, the greatest of the heavenly books.

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[2] According to Abu Bakr Siddique (RAA), "the clearest apprehension of Allah (SWT) possible to man lies in admitting one's total inability to apprehend Him." Sayyidena Ali (RAA) is said to have made the following addition to these words, as if to complete the couplet: "and to make an inquisitive probe into His being can lead to polytheism."

II

Tilawat Wa Tarteel

(Slow, thoughtful reading of the Qur'an with correct pronunciation)

The Arabic equivalents for “reading” are *qir’aat* and *tilawat*. Both these terms have been employed by the Qur’an in connection with the reading of the Qur’an. The term *tilawat* is used for reading the Holy Book with all the reverence due to it as a sacred scripture, with an open mind fully disposed to imbibing its influence, and with a keen desire to model our lives upon its teaching. It is a term specifically used for the reading of heavenly books. *Qir’aat,* however, is a general term used for reading any kind of book. This difference in the connotation of these two words as equivalents of “reading” is borne out by their literal meanings; for *tilawat* means “to follow or walk behind some one,” while *qir’aat* means just “to draw or combine things together.”

In the beginning, the word *qir’aat* was used for learning the Qur’an and acquiring its knowledge, and a *qaari* was originally a scholar of the Qur’an. As time passed, the term was gradually torn from its original meaning and came to be used for reading the Qur’an with correct pronunciation and modulation according to the rules of *tajweed*, whereas the word *tilawat* came to be used as a general term for reading the sacred book with fervor and devotion, for the purpose of seeking guidance and blessings.

Tilawat of the Holy Qur’an is not only an important form of worship but also is an effective method of continually refreshing our *Iman* (faith). The Qur’an is not a book to be understood once and for all. It is a book to be read again and again and to be studied forever, because it provides sustenance to the human soul. As our earthly body is in constant need of food which is obtained from the earth, so too our soul which is of heavenly origin constantly needs the help of Divine Revelation for fostering and strengthening itself. If the Qur’an were to be understood once and for all, there would have been no need for the Holy Prophet (SAW) — of all people — to read it again and again. On the contrary, we find from the study of the Qur’an itself that he was advised to do so. In the earliest days of his prophethood, the Holy Prophet (SAW) was especially instructed to stand for the greater part of the night in prayer before his Lord, reciting the Qur’an in slow, rhythmic tones. In the later stages of his prophetic career, particularly when he was faced with heavy odds and was required to muster up special courage and fortitude to sustain himself, the special instruction he received from his Lord was to recite the Qur’an. In Surah Al-Kahf, he was given the following instructions:

> And recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord: None can change His Words, and none will you find as a refuge other than Him. (Al-Kahf 18:27)

And again, in Surah Al-Ankaboot a similar instruction was repeated:

> Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish regular prayer…. (Al-Ankaboot 29:45)

It follows from the facts stated above that constant and regular study of the Holy Qur’an is essential because it provides food for the soul, because it is a mean of refreshing and reviving faith, and a reliable weapon for surmounting difficulties and obstacles that one encounters in the way of Allah (SWT). The following *ayah* from Surah Al-Baqarah describes how the lovers of the Qur’an manifested their great regard for this Book:

> Those to whom we have delivered the Book recite it as it ought to be recited…. (Al-Baqarah 2:121)

May Allah (SWT) give us strength that we may be able to study the Qur'an as it should be studied. We have, first of all, to understand how the Qur'an ought to be recited and what steps should be taken if the required standard of recitation is to be attained.

1. Tajweed:

In this connection, the first step we are required to take is to acquire a thorough knowledge of the Arabic alphabet, their phonetic sounds, and the significance of the different kinds of pauses used in the Qur'an. The technical term used for this knowledge is *tajweed*, which is a must for a good fluent recitation. In the thirties and forties, almost every Muslim child in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent would start his education with the learning of *tajweed*. At the very outset he was given a clear idea of the letters of the Qur'an and their correct phonetic sounds. Although, as already stated in the beginning of this booklet, some efforts have been made in Pakistan and other Muslim countries to popularize *tajweed*, still the fact remains that a vast majority of the Muslim youth, even a large number of adults and old people among us, cannot read the Qur'an properly. This lack of ability to read even the bare text of the Qur'an is due, on the one hand, to the decline of the classical system of education that was imparted in the mosques and *maktabs* to all the children of the community, rich and poor, and, on the other hand, to the popularity of the kindergarten and other types of modern primary schools which do not include the recitation of the Qur'an in their curriculum. Here I will suggest that all such persons, to whichever age group they may belong, as do not possess the ability to read the Qur'an properly should realize their deficiency and take necessary steps to remove it. We should also adopt it as a decided policy that the education of our children will start with *tajweed* and the first thing they will learn will be how to read the Qur'an correctly. Over-emphasis on this point may not be very desirable, nevertheless it is incumbent upon every educated person to acquire the ability of reading the Qur'an with a correct accent and pronunciation, carefully observing the pauses used in it. Without acquiring this ability our obligation of reciting the Qur'an cannot be fulfilled.

2. Daily Recitation:

If we wish to fulfill our obligation of reciting the Qur'an, the second thing we are required to do is to include the recitation of the Qur'an in the daily routine of our life, and each one of us should recite a certain portion of the Holy Book regularly every day. The portion fixed for daily recitation can be different for different people. The maximum portion which has the support of the Holy Prophet (SAW) is one-third of the Qur'an. It means that ten parts should be recited each day so that the recitation of the whole Qur'an may be completed in three days. A minimum portion — and mind you, any thing less than this bare minimum could not even be imagined till recent years — could be one *para* daily, so that the whole Qur'an could be read in a month. In fact, this is the least amount of recitation which should be done every day and an amount less than this would not be worth the name. The middle position between the maximum and minimum is that one should read the whole Qur'an in a week. This, indeed, was the practice followed by the majority of the Companions (RAA) and the same according to a tradition was suggested to Abdullah Ibn Umar (RAA) by the Holy Prophet (SAW). It is for this reason that the Qur'an was divided into seven *ahzaab* (sections) in the time of the Companions (RAA).[3] The first six of the *ahzaab* consist of three (excluding Surah Al-Fatiha), five, seven, nine, eleven, and thirteen Surahs respectively, and the seventh called *Hizb-ul-mufassal* consists of the rest of the Holy Book. Every *hizb* comprises of approximately four *paras* (parts), which can be recited quite satisfactorily in two hours.

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[3] It may be noted that the present division of the whole text into thirty parts and of each part into smaller sub-parts called *ruku'*, was made much later.

Persons of a devout nature and staunch faith should do this amount of recitation daily. Both the common people and intellectuals must depend upon the regular recitation of the Holy Book for the nourishment of their souls. To the average kind of men it will serve as an admonition or remembrance of God, and to the men of learning and intelligence, as a source of knowledge and food for thought. Even those who ponder over the meaning of the Qur'an day and night, who think deeply over its individual Surahs for years on end, and who pause for long over the subtle points in its text, cannot do without this regular recitation. Indeed, they require its aid all the more in the noble task they have set before themselves. Actually, constant recitation of the Holy Book will help solve many of their problems and will continuously open up new vistas of thought before their minds.[4]

3. Melodious voice:

It is also required for the proper recitation of the Qur'an that a person should read it in the best manner and in the most melodious voice possible. This is necessary because almost every human being is gifted with a love for music and has a natural fondness for sweet and melodious sounds. Islam is a natural region; it does not curb any of our inherent tendencies but diverts them into healthy channels. As we have an instinctive love for the beauty of sight and the beauty of sound, we insist upon a fascinating printing of the Holy Qur'an and its recitation in a soft melodious voice. The Prophet (SAW) has urged us to:

> Adorn the Qur'an with your voices. (Narrated by Abu Daud & Nasai)

He has also warned us against our negligence in this matter in the words:

> One who does not recite the Qur'an in a melodious voice is not from us! (Narrated by Abu Daud)

And has given us the following tidings as a further inducement for melodious recitation:

> Allah (SWT) does not listen to anything so attentively as He listens to the Prophet (SAW) reciting the Qur'an aloud in a sweet voice. (Narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud, & Nasai)

It often happened that, while going along his way, the Holy Prophet (SAW) heard a Companion (RAA) recite the Qur'an in a sweet-sounding voice. He would stop and stand for a long time listening to the Qur'an being recited and would appreciate it later on. Sometimes, he would ask a Companion (RAA) to recite the Qur'an to him. It is stated in the books of traditions that once he asked Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RAA) to recite the Qur'an to him. The latter (much astonished at the request) said: "Messenger of Allah! How can I recite the Qur'an to you, while you are the person to whom it was revealed?" He replied: "I like to hear it being recited by others." Accordingly, Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RAA) began to recite, and, as the Holy Prophet (SAW) sat listening, his eyes welled up with tears which could be seen trickling down his cheeks. On another occasion, he heard a Companion (RAA) recite the Qur'an in a melodious voice which he praised in the words: "You have been granted a share from the musical talent of the sons of Daud (AS)."

Although a person should recite the Qur'an in the most melodious voice he can produce because otherwise the recitation will be far from satisfactory, yet to over-emphasize this aspect of recitation is not without danger. When a melodious recitation is the outcome of mere show or affectation or when one takes to it as a profession, it becomes a serious perversion and a reprehensible practice. We should, therefore, carefully guard against this danger; still we may

[4] It is a common experience of the devoted scholars of the Qur'an that when they are perplexed by an intellectual problem weighing upon their minds, they found that, during course of their recitation of the Qur'an, a clue to the solution of the problem suddenly struck their minds. They got the enlightenment from a passage of the Qur'an which they had read hundred times before, but as their mind was not preoccupied by the problem, the passage did not yield the interpretation relevant to its solution.

seek the satisfaction of our love for the beauty of sound in reciting the Qur'an or in hearing it being recited in a melodious voice. Hence, everyone of us should read the Book of Allah (SWT) in as nice a manner and as sweet a voice as it may be possible for him to do.

4. Objective and Subjective Conditions:

Reciting the Qur'an as it ought to be recited depends upon the fulfillment of a number of objective and subjective conditions. The objective conditions to be fulfilled are that one should perform ablution before starting the recitation, that he should sit facing the *qibla*, and that he should start the recitation with *taa'wwuz* (seeking Allah's protection against the Satan). Subjectively, he should contemplate the greatness of the Book and the greatness of the Being who has revealed it, and should recite it with complete concentration and absorption, a deep feeling of submissiveness and humility, and utmost fervor and devotion. He should read the Book of Allah (SWT) with a sincere and earnest desire to get at the truth, and with a firm resolve to transform himself according to its teachings. He should constantly ponder and deliberate over its meanings, not with a view to finding from it a confirmation of his own preconceived thoughts and theories but genuinely seeking from it the guidance that it offers. As explained above, the literal meaning of *tilawat* is "to follow or walk closely behind someone." Therefore, in the real sense of the term, it demands an attitude of self-abandonment and receptivity. Such an attitude is, indeed, the essence of *tilawat*.

5. Tarteel (Reading in slow, measured rhythmic tones):

The ideal way in which the Holy Book should be recited is that one should stand in post-midnight prayer before his Lord, with hands folded in all humility, and recite the Qur'an in a receptive state of mind, slowly and patiently, pausing at proper places so as to enable one's heart to imbibe its influence. This kind of recitation is called *tarteel*, and perhaps the most important instruction that was given to the Holy Prophet (SAW) in the earliest stage of his prophetic mission was to recite the Qur'an in this manner:

> O you wrapped in garments! Stand (in prayer) by night. But not all night; half of it, or a little less, or a little more. And recite the Qur'an in slow, measured rhythmic tones. (Al-Muzzammil 73:1-4)

Reading the Qur'an slowly and thoughtfully, making pauses at proper points in its text, has a resemblance with the mode of its revelation. As we all know, the whole Qur'an was not revealed at once but it has descended piecemeal at intervals. In the Surah entitled "Furqan," by way of answering those who objected as to why the Qur'an was not revealed all at once, Allah (SWT) says addressing His Messenger (SAW):

> …thus (is it revealed) that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and we have revealed it to you in slow well-arranged stages, gradually. (Al-Furqan 25:32)

This signifies that *tarteel* is an effective means of strengthening the heart's convictions. Undoubtedly, reading the Qur'an on this pattern does the greatest good to the human heart. It often moves one to tears with intensity of feeling. While explaining *tarteel*, Allama Ibn Arabi (RA), the author of *Ahkam-ul-Qur'an*, has quoted the following tradition narrated on the authority of Hasan Ibn Ali (RAA):

> Once the Holy Prophet (SAW) happened to pass by a person who was reading the Qur'an. He was reading it *ayah* by *ayah*, and the end of each he paused and wept. Allah's Messenger (SAW) said to his Companions (RAA): "Have you heard Allah's command: 'Read the Qur'an in slow, measured tones.' Look, here you have its demonstration."

The following words of the Holy Prophet (SAW) contain a similar instruction for *tarteel,* i.e., reading the Qur'an in slow rhythmic tones.

> Recite the Qur'an and weep. (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

The Holy Prophet's (SAW) own condition during the night prayer, which has been described in books of tradition, is a case in point. When he stood in his night prayer reciting the Qur'an slowly and thoughtfully, making short pauses in the recitation, holding a communion with his Lord, he would weep with such intensity of feeling that his breast would produce a sizzling sound as if it were a kettle on fire in which something was being cooked.

6. Committing to Memory:

If the Qur'an is to be recited as it was recited by the Holy Prophet (SAW), we have to learn by heart as much of the Holy Book as possible. Unfortunately, the practice of memorizing portions of the Qur'an for long recitations in the night prayer has almost died out. However, the custom of memorizing the whole Qur'an still exists. Naturally, for this a start has to be made in childhood when the question of understanding the Qur'an does not arise, but even this custom is losing ground. Memorizing the whole Qur'an has unluckily been left to a class of poor and down-trodden people in our society who adopt it as a profession. This was not the case till recent years. In the pre-partition days, the custom of memorizing the entire Qur'an was quite common even among respectable, well-to-do families, and in some cities in undivided India almost every Muslim family had at least one *hafiz* (i.e., one who has learned the whole Qur'an by heart). In those days, it was considered to be discreditable on the part of a family not to have a *hafiz* among its members.

No doubt, memorizing the Qur'an is a noble tradition. It is a part of the Divine dispensation for the preservation of the Qur'an and should be maintained with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. However, committing the whole Qur'an to memory is not within the reach of every person. What I wish to stress here is that every one of us should try his utmost to learn maximum portion of the Qur'an by heart so that he may be able to recite it to his Lord, standing before Him in prayer. This is the essential pre-requisite for reciting the Book of Allah (SWT) as it ought to be recited and as it was recited by the Holy Prophet (SAW) himself, but it is a pity that we have lost eagerness and fervor for memorizing the Qur'an. Even men of religious learning among us have grown quite negligent in this matter. The condition of even those who lead the congregational prayers in mosques is no better. Most of them seem to have become contented with a few short Surahs they have once committed to memory and go on repeating them in prayers. Surely, it is a sad state of affairs which must be corrected. All of us must develop in our hearts a deep love for the Qur'an, look upon the part of the Holy Book we have memorized as our real and most valuable asset in life and make a continuous effort at increasing and enhancing it. Thus shall we be able to experience the blissful joy to *tarteel* and provide for our souls greater and greater amount of sustenance in the best possible form.

III

Tazakkur Wa Tadabbur

(Recalling through the Qur'an the fundamental truths intuitively recognized by human nature, and reflecting over its meaning)

We have discussed two of the claims that the Qur'an has upon us: (i) That we should believe in it and (ii) that we should recite it. Now we proceed to explain the third claim it has upon us. It is that we should understand it. Obviously, the Qur'an has been revealed that it may be understood. There would be no sense in believing in it if we do not follow its meanings. Also,

how can it serve as a source of guidance for us if we fail to comprehend its message. Mere recitation (i.e., recitation without understanding the meaning of the text) may be excusable in the case of persons who have not been fortunate enough to receive any education, and who are now past the age at which one can do so. Even a clumsy recitation on their part may be acceptable and may win them a reward from Allah (SWT). Similarly, a person who cannot read the Qur'an at all, nor can learn how to do so, may get a reward and blessings from Allah (SWT) if he just moves his fingers affectionately and reverently along the lines of the Holy Book believing it to be *kalam Allah* (the Word of Allah). However, the case of those persons will be quite different who may have devoted a considerable part of their lives to their own secular education — who may have acquired a knowledge of different arts and sciences and may have learnt foreign languages besides their own. If these educated persons were to read the Qur'an thoughtlessly and without understanding its meaning, then it is very much possible that, in the sight of Almighty Allah (SWT), they may be considered guilty of dishonoring and ridiculing the Holy Book. For these persons, it is possible that the punishment for ignoring the meaning and message of the Qur'an may exceed the reward for reciting its text. However, if they make a firm resolve to acquire a knowledge of the Qur'an and start earnest efforts in this direction, they may in the meantime continue to read the Qur'an in the way they can. Perhaps, under the circumstances, recitation, mere and simple, may be acceptable from them and may even bring them a reward from Allah (SWT).

As for the comprehension of the Qur'an, it is not a simple affair. It has numerous stages and grades accessible to different persons according to the levels of their thinking. The Holy Qur'an is like an unbounded sea from which a scholar can bring out pearls of knowledge and wisdom according to his natural ability, intellectual equipment, and mental makeup. His efforts to comprehend the Qur'an will be rewarded in proportion to the enthusiasm, time, and labor that he puts into its study and research. At the same time, it will be found that so far as its comprehension is concerned, no person, however intelligent and learned, shall ever feel that he has done justice to the Qur'an even though he may have spent his whole life pouring over its pages and meditating over its meanings. The Holy Prophet (SAW) himself has characterized the Qur'an as a treasure (of knowledge and wisdom) which shall never to exhausted.[5] It is such a source of guidance that man shall ever continue to feel the need of reverting to it and reflecting upon it.

…for this let (all) those strive who want to strive. (Al-Mutaffifin 83:26)

Therefore, let men of courage and determination come forward to undertake the stupendous task of Qur'anic research, fired with the noble ambition of surpassing others in this field.

The Holy Qur'an urges us again and again to study it intelligently, bringing our thought to bear upon it, and exercising our reasoning faculty in following its arguments and comprehending its meanings. For this purpose, it uses such words as *fahm, 'aql, fiqh,* and *fikr*[6]; but another important term, more widely used in the Qur'an in this context is *tazakkur*. For understanding the significance of this term we have to note that the Qur'an frequently calls itself

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[5] In a long tradition narrated by Sayyidena Ali (RAA), we have the following remark of the Holy Prophet (SAW) about the Qur'an: "The scholars shall never be satiated with the study of the Qur'an, nor will its appeal ever diminish on account of repeated readings, nor will its marvels be ever exhausted (i.e., its study will ever continue to yield fresh fruits of knowledge and wisdom)." Reported by Tirmidhi (RA) and Darimi (RA).

[6] The first three words are approximate synonyms meaning "understanding," and the last one means "reflection."

zikr, *zikra* and *tazkirah*.[7] In reality, *tazakkur* pertains to the first stage in the comprehension of the Qur'an and indicates the real purpose and final goal which it should serve. It also alludes to the fact that the Qur'anic teachings are not extraneous to the human nature. It actually reflects the experiences of man's inner self and is meant to awaken reminiscences of something already apprehended, rather than to import anything altogether new. The Holy Qur'an appeals to all thoughtful persons whom it addresses as *ulul albab* (men of understanding) and *qaumun yaqilun* (people who use their intellect) to think and ponder over the outer universe of matter as well as the inner universe of the spirit, as both are replete with the unmistakable signs of the Almighty Creator (SWT). Simultaneously, the Qur'an invites them to deliberate over its own signs,[8] i.e., its Divinely revealed verses. In Surah Yunus it says:

> …thus do we explain the signs in detail for those who reflect. (Yunus 10:24)

and in Surah Nahl:

> …and we have sent down unto you the *Zikr* that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought. (Al-Nahl 16:44)

Again, in the same vein, we have in the second Surah, Al-Baqarah:

> Thus Allah makes clear His signs to you, in order that you may understand. (Al-Baqarah 2:242)

and similarly in the beginning of Surah Yusuf we have the following *ayah*:

> Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an in order that you may understand. (Yusuf 12:2)

Pondering over the three categories of signs (i.e., the Qur'anic signs, the signs in the physical universe, and the signs in the spiritual world of the human heart) a man will be able to perceive a perfect concord between them; and, with the realization of this concord, he will grasp certain fundamental truths which are borne out by the internal testimony of his own nature. The truths cherished by his inner self will emerge from its depths and shine with all their brilliance on the screen of his consciousness. In other words, full and intense awareness of the Absolute Reality, which is the core of *Iman*, will then spring up to his conscious mind like the memory of a forgotten thing shooting up from the dark depths of the mind to its surface with the aid of a pertinent suggestion. For this very phenomenon, the Qur'an uses the term *tazakkur.*[9] Every person, whether mediocre or an intellectual, is in constant need of *tazakkur* which is necessary for recalling to the mind the truths that have been forgotten or for keeping in mind the truths that are likely to be forgotten. It is for this reason that Allah (SWT) has made the Qur'an so easy for the purposes of *tazakkur* — a fact which has been stated four times in the same Surah:

> We have made the Qur'an easy as a means of reminding (men of the truths forgotten by them). Is there any who will benefit from this reminding? (Al-Qamar 54:17, 22, 32, 40)

The Qur'an has thus declared in unequivocal terms that every person can get the benefit of *tazakkur* from it. It does not matter if a person's intelligence is limited, and his knowledge of logic and philosophy is poor; and if he has no fine sense of language and literature. In spite of these drawbacks, he can have *tazakkur* from the Qur'an if he has a noble heart, a sound mind, and

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[7] These are words from the same root with slightly different meanings. Their English equivalents are "remembrance," "warning" and "admonition."

[8] The Qur'an calls its verses *ayaat*, i.e., signs (of Allah). These verses are considered signs of Allah (SWT) — as important as any other of His signs in the universe or in the heart of the human individual. It is because the Qur'anic verses are *kalam Allah* and also because, like other signs of Allah (SWT), they too, turn man's mind to the Almighty.

[9] Literally the word means "to remember; to recall." In the Qur'anic sense of the term it means "to recall forgotten Truths."

an untainted nature not perverted by any kind of crookedness. He should read the Qur'an and should go on understanding its simple meanings. This will be enough for the purposes of *tazakkur*.

The Qur'an has been rendered easy in different ways for those who try to understand it and derive *tazakkur* from it. In the first place, its central theme and basic subjects are nothing new or unfamiliar to the human nature. While reading the Qur'an a man often feels as if he were listening to the echoes of his inner self. Secondly, the mode of inference adopted is simple and natural, and difficult and abstruse subjects have been brought home to the reader by easy and simple parables. Thirdly, although the Qur'an is a masterpiece of literature and a paragon of eloquence, yet its language is generally simple and a man with a smattering of Arabic can easily understand the text except a few difficult portions. In spite of all this, for the attainment of *tazakkur* from the Qur'an, a basic knowledge of Arabic is a must. Looking into a translation along with reading the text will not be sufficient from this purpose. I most honestly feel that it is imperative for every Muslim to acquire as much knowledge of the Arabic language as may enable him to understand the simple meaning of the Qur'anic text as he reads it along, without having to raise his eyes again and again for consulting a translation.

I fail to understand what excuse will be put forward in the court of the Almighty (SWT) in their defense by those Muslims who are not only educated but have obtained graduate and post-graduate degrees and have mastered such difficult arts and sciences like Medicine and Engineering, for not learning so much Arabic that they could follow His Holy Book. Out of a sincere regard and genuine concern for these Muslims, let me assert that their negligence in the matter of learning Arabic is tantamount to not only ridiculing the Book of Allah (SWT) but also treating it with contempt. They should realize that by their irresponsible behavior in this regard they are rendering themselves liable to an awful chastisement and a dreadful penalty on the Day of Judgment.

In my humble opinion, to learn so much Arabic as may enable a person to follow the meaning of the Qur'an easily is a duty that every educated Muslim owes to the Holy Book, and not to fulfill this duty is a grave injustice to the Qur'an as well as to ourselves.

The second stage in the comprehension of the Qur'an is *tadabbur fil-Qur'an*, i.e., thinking over it deeply, making it a subject of intense study and diving into the depths of its knowledge and wisdom. The Qur'an requires such a deep study because it is *huda lil-naas* i.e., guidance for humankind. Not only does it guide the common people by presenting them correct view of God and the universe as well as sound moral principles, but it also contains perfect guidance for men of learning and understanding and has always served them as a beacon of light in every intellectual or spiritual crisis in their life.

That the Qur'an is something to be reflected and pondered over is a point which has been emphasized by the Qur'an itself:

> Here is a book which we have sent down to you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition. (Sad 38:29)

By way of stressing this point further, it says, in a mildly admonishing vein:

> So, do they not reflect on the Qur'an?… (Al-Nisa 4:82)
>
> Do they not then deeply think over the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up? (Muhammad 47:24)

The Qur'an is quite easy for *tazakkur* but is, in the same degree, difficult for *tadabbur*.[10] Those who dive into this boundless ocean know that it is not possible to fathom its depth. We learn from authentic traditions that the Companions (RAA) of the Holy Prophet (SAW) used to ponder over the different Surahs of the Qur'an for years on end. It is reported about Abdullah Ibn Umar (RAA) that he spent eight years contemplating over Surah Al-Baqarah. Let it be noted that this was the case with the people who spoke the same language in which the Qur'an was revealed and who, being the contemporaries of the Holy Prophet (SAW), had seen it being revealed before their own eyes. There was no necessity for them to learn the Arabic language and its grammar or to undertake research for ascertaining the historical background of different *ayaat* or Surahs and the occasions on which they were revealed. In spite of all these advantages, they pondered over each Surah for years together. This shows that diving into this sea of knowledge and wisdom is not a child's play. On the other hand, it calls for strenuous labor and constant application. In the later ages, great scholars like Tabari (RA), Zamakhshari (RA) and Razi (RA) and many others of the same caliber dedicated their whole lives to the study of the Qur'an, but each of them at best could interpret a single aspect of this great Book and, honestly speaking, failed to do justice even to that aspect. Throughout the fourteen centuries, there has been no scholar who, having written the most voluminous commentary on the Qur'an, might have claimed that he had said the last word on it and had left no room for further deliberation.

Imam Ghazali (RA) in his *Ihya-ul-Uloom* has quoted the words of a divine which bring out the difference between the ordinary recitation of the Qur'an for *tazakkur* and its thoughtful study for *tadabbur*. He says: "There is a recitation which takes me a week to finish the Qur'an. There is another kind of recitation which takes me a month, and another which takes me a year to finish it. There is still another kind of recitation which I commenced thirty years ago but which has not yet enabled me to complete its reading."

The qualifications for a deliberative study of the Qur'an are extremely hard to acquire. It is not possible for a man to attain these qualifications unless he devotes himself to it wholly and solely and makes the learning and teaching of the Qur'an the be-all and end-all of his life. For such a study, he requires a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language and its grammar and a refined literary taste to appreciate the beauty, force, and eloquence of expression. He must also acquire a good grounding in the language in which the Qur'an was revealed by a critical study of the works of the pre-Islamic poets and orators. Then there are the terms and modes of expression evolved by the Qur'an itself. A clear understanding of these (which will be possible only after a careful study of the Qur'an for a pretty long time) is also a necessary part of the mental equipment of a student of the Qur'an. Moreover, he should be able to appreciate the coordination and coherence in the Qur'an. He must grasp the deep significance of the present order of the Surahs in the Qur'an, which is different from the chronological order in which they were revealed. He must also comprehend the sequence of thought between one Surah and the other, as well as between the *ayaat* of the same Surah. This is an extremely arduous task which has defied the patience of even the most determined scholars. But this task, however arduous, has to be accomplished and unless it is accomplished, the question of comprehending the Qur'an will not arise. In fact, it is only when one is diving into the Qur'an for grasping the subtle sequence between its parts that one forms an idea of the unfathomable depths of this boundless sea, and brings out from it the finest pearls of knowledge and wisdom.

Besides the branches of learning referred to above, a good knowledge of Ahadith and old Scriptures is also necessary for the comprehension of the Qur'an. All this is with regard to the

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[10] The word literally means "reflection" or "deliberation," but it is used as a Qur'anic term with a special significance which has been explained in the discussion that follows.

background of classical knowledge which should be possessed by a research scholar of the Qur'an.

Even this, however, is not all. He is not yet fully equipped to do justice to a deep and thoughtful study of the Qur'an, the type of study required for *tadabbur*. He has still to reckon with modern sciences. We know that experimental and theoretical sciences are not static. Their level of advancement has been different in different ages. A scholar who wants to undertake the momentous task of comprehending the Qur'an should have an understanding of modern sciences — physical, biological, and social. He should be particularly conversant with the basic hypotheses of different sciences and with the method of deduction and inference employed by each. He should also keep himself in touch with the latest trends and achievements in every important field of human inquiry. This knowledge of modern arts and sciences is essential for him, as it will widen his mental outlook and increase his intellectual capacity.

Thus equipped, he will embark upon his great enterprise. The Qur'an is a boundless ocean on which every sailor can sail only as far as his limited capacity can take him; and what useful discoveries he will make on his voyage will depend on the guidance he receives from the range of his knowledge and the breadth of his vision.

Particularly for the dissemination of the teaching of the Qur'an and the propagation of its message in the present day world (which is also a duty incumbent upon every Muslim), it is necessary that one should be fully equipped with modern knowledge, otherwise he will not be able to discharge this duty. Each generation inherits a large amount of knowledge from its predecessors and transmits it on to the succeeding generation with its own contribution added to it. Thus knowledge goes on accumulating as it passes from one generation to another. The present generation has received, by this process of transmission, a stupendous stock of knowledge consisting of logic and philosophy, religion and metaphysics, ethics and psychology and other social sciences. This huge amount of current knowledge has dominated and dazzled the mind of the people who had developed a naive belief in many wrong views. One requires a fairly good knowledge of modern sciences and should be conversant with not only the subject-matter of these sciences but also with their original sources and the system of principles underlying them. Only then he will be able to deal a crushing blow, in the manner of Ibn Taimiyyah (RA) and Imam Ghazali (RA), at the very root of the false notions prevailing in his time. In this respect, the present age has touched the highest watermark. Besides the remarkable progress in the field of social sciences, it has witnessed as unprecedented advancement of the physical sciences and technology which has stunned the humanity and has rendered it incapable of making critical appraisal of the misguiding views that have found currency in the modern world.

Under these circumstances, the imperative duty of comprehending and interpreting the Qur'an cannot be fulfilled unless some patient and persevering men address themselves to this momentous task with single-minded devotion, equipping themselves with both classical and modern knowledge adequate for the task. These dedicated and fully equipped scholars of the Qur'an would carry out a searching analysis of the modern knowledge and sift the sound from the fallacious in the light of the Qur'an. They would approach the intellect of the modern man, making a judicious use of modern terminology and sophisticated methods of logical reasoning. Thus they would be able to illumine the minds of their contemporaries with the light of Qur'anic guidance. In this way the duty of "explaining the Qur'an to the people" which was performed by the Holy Prophet (SAW) himself in his life time would be performed by his *Ummah* in the present age.

Now the question arises: How can we produce such scholars? Obviously they cannot be produced until we have, all over the Muslim world, a network of universities which concentrate on Qur'anic Research, making it the hub and center of their intellectual activity. Round this

central department, these universities should build up other departments like the department of theoretical sciences such as logic, metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and religion; the department of social sciences such as economics, political science, and law; and the department of physical sciences such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, geology and astronomy. Every student who joins such a university should take up Qur'anic Studies as a compulsory subject and should study one or more of the disciplines as elective subjects according to his own taste and aptitude. Thus he will be able to carry out research on the Qur'an in the sphere of his own study and present the light and guidance of the Qur'an effectively to the people.

Obviously, this is not an easy task. That is why it is not the responsibility of every person. It is to be done by only those persons who are born with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and whose minds are agitated by obstinate problems which can only be solved through prolonged thinking and reasoning. Such men are impelled to imbibe learning as a starving person is compelled to seek food and drink, and they march on, constantly uttering the prayer: "My Lord! Advance me in knowledge." If they happen to receive proper guidance, they get a goodly share of knowledge and wisdom. Comprehension and interpretation of the Qur'an is, in reality, the privilege of these persons. However, every seeker of knowledge can participate in this noble task according to his ability and the time he can devote to the task. In order to provide an inducement to people for the study of the Qur'an the Holy Prophet (SAW) has said:

> The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it (to others). (Narrated by Bukhari)

and, in the same context, we have a general instruction in the Qur'an:

> …why did not some people from every habitation leave their homes so that they could develop an understanding of religion…. (Al-Taubah 9:122)

This understanding of religion is the fruit of a deep and meditative study of Qur'an. It is this understanding which the Holy Prophet (SAW) wanted his Companions (RAA) to develop. He especially prayed for some of them that they might be granted a keen insight into religion. He also qualified his observation that "The best of you in *Jahiliyyah* are the best of you in Islam" with "provided they understand the religion."

IV

Hukm Wa Iqamat

(Molding the personal life of the individual and the collective life of the community according to the teaching of the Qur'an)

We have already considered three of the duties we owe to the Qur'an and now we proceed to consider the fourth. It is that we should act upon its teachings. Obviously, we are required to believe in the Qur'an, study it, and ponder over its meanings in order that we may act upon its teachings in our actual life. The Qur'an is not a book of magical formulas or mantras which are chanted to ward off evil. It is not a mere instrument for the attaining of blessings. Its *ayaat* are not to be recited only for the sake of getting a reward from Allah (SWT) or for reducing the agony of death. Nor is it a subject of investigation and research in the sense that it should provide a good exercise to our intellectual and imaginative faculties so that we could indulge in all sorts of abstruse thinking and useless hair-splitting in the interpretation of its meanings.

The Qur'an, as we all know, is *huda lil-naas*, guidance for mankind. The purpose for which this Book has been revealed will be realized only if people act upon its teachings and make it a guide for them in every sphere of their life. The Holy Prophet (SAW) has made it crystal clear that no useful purpose will be served by reading the Qur'an and pondering over its meaning if we

do not try to mold our lives according to its injunctions. If we disregard its injunctions, the reading of the Qur'an, instead of doing us any good, will undermine our faith. In this context, the Holy Book speaks in unequivocal terms:

> …and whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, such are the disbelievers. (Al-Ma'idah 5:44)

We have further clarification of, and emphasis over this point in the following traditions of the Holy Prophet (SAW):

> None of you can become a believer until all his desires are subordinated to what I have brought (i.e., the Revealed Guidance). (Narrated in Sharah Al-Sunnah)

> One who deems lawful what the Qur'an declares unlawful is not a believer in the Qur'an (i.e., in reality, he does not hold it to be a Divine Revelation.) (Narrated by Tirmidhi)

The case of a person who is still exploring and wandering in quest of truth, and has yet to decide after a careful study of the Qur'an whether it is the absolute truth or not, is different. However, the person who believes the Qur'an to be the Book of Allah (SWT) cannot benefit himself from it at all unless he studies it with a firm resolve that, however heavy the odds and however great the sacrifices, he would abide by its injunctions and modify his character according to its teachings. As we have already stated while explaining the literal meaning of the term *tilawat*, the Qur'an yields its perfect guidance only to those who abandon themselves to it and pore over it long and assiduously. Self-abandonment combined with a prolonged concentration born of a deep cultivated self-discipline generates that state of submissiveness and self-effacement which has been referred to in the above-quoted tradition viz: "None of you can become a believer until all his desires are subordinated to what I have brought."

A person who desires to get full guidance from the Qur'an has, first of all, to put himself into this state of mind and afterwards as his contact with the Qur'an becomes closer and closer he will continue to get greater and greater enlightenment from it. The Holy Qur'an affirms:

> While as for those who accept guidance, He increases their guidance and bestows on them their piety. (Muhammad 47:17)

It means that if a person actually makes a start, moving under the guidance of the Qur'an, he will soon find himself marching steadily along the straight path and he will go on gradually rising to the higher and higher planes of spiritual development. On the other hand, if a person has not made up his mind to transform himself in accordance with the Qur'anic teachings; the time he spends on reciting the Holy Book will be just wasted. Recitation of the Qur'an, instead of doing him any spiritual good, may actually prove to be curse on him. Imam Ghazali (RA) has quoted some mystic as saying that "Some readers of the Qur'an do not get anything from it except the imprecation which it pronounces upon them. When he recites "Allah's curse is on the liars" while he himself is a liar, he becomes the target of this curse." Similarly, when a reader reads:

> So, if they do not desist (from devouring interest), give them an ultimatum of a war on behalf of Allah and His Messenger…. (Al-Baqarah 2:279)

and if he himself violates this injunction of Almighty Allah (SWT), he becomes the addressee of this ultimatum. In the same way, when those persons who give short measure or short weight and those who indulge in backbiting and carping, read "Woe to those who give less in measure and weight" (Al-Mutaffifin 83:1) and "Woe to every slanderer and backbiter" (Al-Humazah 104:1), then they themselves become the addressees of these dreadful warnings. Reasoning on this line, we can easily understand what a man will gain from the recitation of the Qur'an if his actions are not in accordance with its teachings.

As for those who study the Qur'an for investigation and research, for reflection over its meanings and for writing or compiling books on it, if they do not put the injunctions of the Qur'an into practice, we can say that they are the worst sinners. Their study and research is like indulging in a fascinating intellectual exercise which is tantamount to mere toying with the Holy Book, or even making fun of it. Consequently, instead of guiding them to the right path, it causes them to deviate and go astray:

> …by it He causes many to stray, and many He leads to the right path…. (Al-Baqarah 2:26)

These so-called scholars of the Qur'an disseminate all sorts of mischievous interpretations and become instrumental in misleading and misguiding the people in different ways. Their whole thinking on the Holy Book is motivated by a vicious attempt to run after the abstruse and the recondite. The Qur'an has aptly described their motives in doing so in the following words:

> …So they follow the part thereof that is figurative, seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings... (Aal Imran 3:7)

The Companions (RAA) understood the supreme importance of incorporating teachings of the Qur'an into their lives. That is the reason why those, who had a special aptitude for reflecting over the Holy Book and would spend years together pondering over its a Surah, made such long pauses in their study. It was not so much for the assimilation of the fruit of their research or the consolidation of their theoretical knowledge as for developing a capacity for acting upon the Qur'anic teachings. They would not go ahead until they were satisfied that they were able to put into practice what they had learned from the Qur'an. Perhaps the reader will be a little surprised to know that by learning a Surah by heart, the Companions (RAA) did not mean only preserving it in memory but also comprehending its meanings clearly and molding their character in the light of the guidance they received from it. Positively, what the Companions (RAA) actually meant by *hifz al-Qur'an* (memorizing the whole Qur'an) was that its words should be preserved in a person's memory, its knowledge should be treasured up in his mind, and its teachings should be reflected in his conduct so that his whole personality was imbued with the spirit of the Qur'an and the deepest recesses of his being were illumined by its light.

The type of relationship between human conduct and the Qur'an visible in the lives of the Companions (RAA) was to be found in its most consummate and perfect form in the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Ummul Momineen Ayesha (RAA) — wife of the Holy Prophet (SAW), who had the most intimate knowledge of his life and who as such was destined to play the role of a teacher for the *Ummah* — was once questioned about the Prophet's (SAW) mode of life. She answered "His character was an embodiment of the teachings of the Qur'an." This extremely wise and judicious answer brings into relief the deep impact which the Qur'an must have on the life of a true Muslim.

In short, the best way to benefit from the study of the Qur'an is that we should go on mending our ways and modifying our conduct in the light of its teachings as we go on developing a deeper and deeper understanding of its meanings so that the Qur'an permeates into the composition of our character; otherwise there is a danger that — according to the pronouncement of the Holy Prophet (SAW) that "The Qur'an is a plea either for you or against you" — the knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an may become an irrefutable argument against us for our damnation and may become instrumental in bringing us a greater punishment from the Almighty for our negligence and indifference.

Here it is necessary to explain that *Amal bil-Qur'an* (acting upon the Qur'anic injunctions) has two phases — individual and collective. There are injunctions which pertain to a person's individual or private life and which he can carry out immediately. These become binding on him as soon as he comes to know of them. There is absolutely no justification on his part for

any postponement or delay in the matter of incorporating these injunctions into his conduct. The punishment for negligence shown in this matter appears in the form of the withdrawal of Divine Grace and his consequent failure to live up to the principles embodied in the Holy Book. This gaping disparity between his word and deed, and between his belief and action, which is so hateful to Almighty Allah (SWT) amounts to hypocrisy. This very fact has been referred to by the Holy Prophet (SAW) in these words:

> Most of the hypocrites among my followers will be the readers of the Qur'an. (Narrated by Ahmad)

Therefore, the only safe course for a person would be that he should immediately begin to act upon what he has been able to learn from the Qur'an.

As regards the injunctions which pertain to such affairs of our collective life as are beyond the control of an individual person, it is clear that he will not be bound to act upon them immediately. Nevertheless, it is his duty to try as far as possible to change the existing conditions and help in the establishment of a society based on the Qur'anic principles so that it may become possible to act upon the entire teaching of the Qur'an. Under these circumstances, the efforts made by him in this direction will be "an excuse from him with his Lord"[11] and will become a substitute for actual compliance with the injunctions that pertain to collective life. However, if he does not make any efforts in this direction and remains content with himself and with his personal devotions, with his personal survival and the well-being of his family, then there is a danger that even his enactment of Qur'anic injunctions relating to personal and private matters will resemble the reprehensible practice of those whom the Qur'an censures in the following words:

> …then do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest?….[12] (Al-Baqarah 2:85)

Just as *tazakkur* is a general term for the understanding of the Qur'an, similarly the most general and widely-used term for acting upon its teachings is *hukm bima anzalallah* (to judge in the light of what Allah has revealed).[13]

For grasping the real significance of the word *hukm*, which is the core of this term, we should consider its use in the following *ayaat*:

> …the authority is for none but Allah…. (Yusuf 12:40)

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[11] This refers to an incident narrated by the Qur'an, as follows:

> When some of them said: "Why do you preach to a people whom Allah will destroy or visit with a terrible punishment?" (The preachers) replied: "(We are doing this so) that it may be accepted as an excuse by our Lord, and perchance they may fear Him,"…. (Al-A'raf 7:164)

[12] These words are followed by a warning which should send a shudder through any person with a sensitive heart, but it is a pity that we have adopted the same ways against which we have been warned. The result is that the warning — "What is the reward for those among you who behave like this but disgrace in this life? And on the Day of Judgment they shall be consigned to the most grievous penalty. Allah is not unmindful of what they do." — is coming true for us. So far as disgrace in this life is concerned, it has already fallen to our lot and the Muslims all the world over present a pitiable spectacle of wretchedness and degradation. As regards the chastisement in the Hereafter, we feel that we richly deserve that too; but if Allah (SWT) forgives us out of His Infinite Kindness and Mercy, it would be a different matter. "If you punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily, You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." (Al-An'am 6: 118) How aptly applies the following tradition of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to our present condition: "Verily, some would Allah exalt due to (their following of) this Book, and others He would disgrace (as a result of their abandoning it)." Reported by Omar Ibn Khattab (RAA) and narrated by Imam Muslim (RA).

[13] The words in the brackets are the literal translation of the phrase. Its real significance will be grasped from the discussion that follows.

Here this word has been used in the sense of "command" or "authority."

> And thus have we revealed it to be a criterion for judgment, in Arabic…. (Al-Ra'd 13:37)

Here the Qur'an has been styled as *Hukm*, which has been translated here as "a criterion of judgment."

> Surely, We have sent down to you (O Muhammad!) the Book in truth, that you may judge between men by that which Allah has shown you…. (Al-Nisa 4:105)

Here a derivative of the word *hukm* has been used to indicate the mission of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

Ayaat 44 to 47 of Surah Ma'idah categorically state that those who do not judge by the light of the Qur'an are none other than the unbelievers, the wrong-doers and the rebels.

If we try to express the sense of the word *hukm* in one word, the nearest English equivalent that strikes our mind would be "judgment" or "decision." However, in order to understand its full significance we must think of the two basic constituents of a person's conduct i.e., "thought" and "action." When a view-point or a thought so completely dominates a person's mind that it comes to determine his judgment or decision, his action will be automatically subordinated to it. Therefore, for expressing the idea of putting its injunctions into practice, the Qur'an has employed the highly significant term *hukm bima anzalallah* (deciding every issue in the light of what is revealed by Allah). The use of this term indicates that a person will act upon the teachings of the Qur'an only when his thinking is dominated by the Holy Book and the knowledge of Reality imparted by it has gone deep down into both his heart and his mind.

Another term that is used by the Qur'an to denote the idea of acting upon the teaching of the Holy Book is *Iqamah* (standing fast by). It has been used in a *ayah* 69 of Surah Ma'idah, which says about the Jews and the Christians that:

> And if only they had stood fast by the Torah and the Gospel and all the revelation that were sent to them from their Lord, they would surely have gotten provision from above them and from underneath their feet…. (Al-Ma'idah 5:66)

Again it is used in *ayah* 71 of the same Surah, which makes the announcement:

> Say: "O people of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been sent down to you from your Lord"…. (Al-Ma'idah 5:68)

The term *hakm bima anzalallah* pertains to making the conduct of the individual conform to the teaching of Qur'an, but *Iqamah ma unzila minallah* pertains to the collective conduct of the community. It signifies the establishment of a system of life based on social justice which ensures perfect balance and harmony between the individual members of the society and its different classes. When people come to owe allegiance to such a perfect social order, the possibility of tyranny and transgression, cruelty and injustice is absolutely ruled out and all the doors of political oppression and economic exploitation are closed. This is why the *ayah* 69 of Surah Al-Mai'dah quoted above specifically refers to the general social well-being and economic prosperity as an inevitable concomitant of such a system.

This establishment of a perfectly just and equitable social order is the very purpose for which Allah (SWT) sent His messengers and revealed His Books:

> We have surely sent our messengers with clear signs (i.e., miracles and proofs), and sent with them the Book (i.e., revealed guidance) and the Balance (i.e., the *Shari'ah*), so that mankind may stand by justice…. (Al-Hadeed 57:25)

In the second *ruku'* of Surah Al-Shura we have a detailed discussion of this topic. Here we have a clear picture of the coordination subsisting between the fundamental Islamic concepts,

mentioned in a highly meaningful and judicious sequence. These include Allah's authority or decision, establishment of *Deen*,[14] belief in the Revealed Book, and the establishment of the just social order.

To begin with, we have the fundamental principle that Allah's authority of decision is supreme, and in *ayah* 10 we have, accordingly, been directed to recognize and uphold it under all eventualities:

> And whatever it be wherein you differ, the decision thereof is with Allah…. (Al-Shura 42:10)

Ayah 13 of the same Surah refers to the manifestation of Allah's authority or decision in the form of *Deen* and *Shari'ah*.[15]

> The same *Deen* has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah, which We have revealed to you (O Muhammad!) and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus; namely, that you should establish *Deen* and make no divisions therein…. (Al-Shura 42:13)

Then in *ayah* 15, the Holy Prophet (SAW) has been instructed to declare his belief in the Book and to strive for the creation of a just society by practically dispensing justice to the people:

> Now then, for that (reason) call (them to the same Deen) and stand steadfast as you are commanded, and follow not their desires but say: "I believe in the Book which Allah has sent down; and I am commanded to do justice among you…." (Al-Shura 42:15)

This whole discussion is summed up in *ayah* 17:

> It is Allah Who has sent down the Book in truth and the balance (i.e., *Shari'ah*, by which to weigh conduct). And what will make you know that perhaps the Hour is close at hand? (Al-Shura 42:17)

Here again, as in the *ayah* from Surah Al-Hadeed quoted above, we have the word *meezan* (or balance) which is a very significant term used at different places in the Qur'an. Maulana Sahbbir Ahmad Usmani (RA) has offered a comprehensive explanation of the term in the following words:

> Allah has guided man to devise the material balance by which material objects are weighed. He has also granted man the intellectual balance, which is another name for sense of justice and fair play. But most important, the balance granted to us is the Religion of Truth which settles the basic issue of the respective right of the Creator and His creatures and by which all issues can be justly decided.

According to the Qur'an, the real cause of people's deviation from the true religion, and of the chaos and anarchy in the world, is their wicked tendency to dominate over others and keep them under subjugation. In *ayah* 14 of this very Surah where the Muslims are exhorted to curb schismatic trends, the cause of people's breaking away from the Religion of Allah (SWT) and forming sects has been pointed out:

> And they became divided only after knowledge had reached them, through inequity and oppression among themselves…. (Al-Shura 42:14)

We are now led to consider the final fruit of molding our thought and action according to the teachings of Qur'an. It should be, as we have discussed above, the establishment of Allah's Sovereignty and the rule of justice in the world. When such an order is set up, the world becomes free from all sorts of inequity and oppression. Then the priests and divines cannot install themselves as godheads; the wealthy can no longer keep the circulation of wealth confined among themselves, and there is no possibility of any kind of coercion and exploitation. All become

[14] Generally translated as "religion" the term *Deen* signifies the fundamental principles of Divine Guidance and the complete way of life which comes into shape from putting these principles into practice.
[15] The code of law based on the injunctions of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

servants of Allah (SWT) and begin to behave towards one another like brothers. Their rulers consider it their foremost duty to safeguard the rights of the weak at all cost, and not to allow the powerful to tyrannize over them in any way.

The establishment of such a just and equitable order in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an is the bounden duty of its followers. Its fulfillment is the believers' collective responsibility for which they will be answerable to the Almighty. It is, therefore, time they should clearly understand this responsibility and strive hard to discharge it. Perhaps that is why at the end of the discussion in Surah Al-Shura which we have reproduced briefly above, there is a mention of the Day of Judgment in the words: "perhaps the Hour is close at hand." It implies the warning that we should not be guilty of any negligence and delay in this important matter lest we should be suddenly overtaken by the final Doom. This duty that we owe to the Book of Allah (SWT) will be fulfilled if we actually set up a system of social equity so that "mankind may stand by justice" and their rulers "may do justice among them." It will be seen that we have the foundation and structure of this system in the fundamental principles of our *Deen* and its code of life that have been enunciated by the Qur'an.

It may well be asked as to what practical measures should be adopted for the fulfillment of this duty. Although a complete answer to this question is beyond the scope of this booklet, still a few remarks on this topic will not be out of place here. In the first place, let it be understood that the enforcement of the fundamental principles of *Deen* in the society and the establishment of a just and equitable order as envisaged by the Qur'an should not be conceived on the pattern of any secularized social, economic, or political movement, nor should we strive for the achievement of this splendid ideal as we do for the success of these movements. To do so would be fraught with grave danger and may even be suicidal. We must know that just as there is only one method of bringing about the transformation of an individual as required by Islam, similarly there is only one method of effecting an Islamic Revolution in the society. So far as the individual is concerned, we should first make the Qur'an dominate his heart and mind so that his feeling, thinking, and reasoning may function in consonance with the Qur'anic spirit and his actions may, consequently, accord with Qur'anic teachings; and likewise for the change in society demanded by Islam, we have first to illumine the minds and hearts of its intelligentsia with the light of the Qur'an so that they are intellectually and spiritually transformed. After the edification of the intelligentsia who are the brain of the community, the light of the Qur'an could easily spread to other people who are, so to speak, the limbs of the community and generally follow its brain. Thus the heart of the whole community will beat in unison with the teachings of the Qur'an and the fundamental principles of Allah's *Deen* will come to operate and prevail in the form of a perfect system of collective justice.

There is no other way of bringing about this revolution, and the plea that this goal could be achieved by launching a political movement by exploiting the emotional attachment of a Muslim people to their hereditary religion is absolutely vain, and making such an attempt would be like building sand castles.

Hoping to be excused for this digression, I must repeat that the duty of acting upon the teachings of the Qur'an — which assumes two forms, *hukm bima anzalallah*[16] and *Iqamah ma unzila minallah*[17] — is an absolute imperative upon the Muslims, both individually and collectively; and, therefore, each one of us according to his means and capacity and the whole

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[16] Literally "judging or deciding (every issue) in the light of what Allah (SWT) has sent down," the term has been explained in the foregoing discussion.

[17] Literally "establishment of what has been sent from Allah," the true significance of the term, which has been explained in the preceding discussion, is the actual enforcement of the fundamental principles of Islam and its code of life at the socio-political level.

Ummah according to its strength and resources should earnestly endeavor to discharge this great responsibility.

V

Tableegh Wa Tabyeen

(Propagation of the Qur'anic message and its exposition)

Besides the four duties that we owe to the Qur'an, i.e., believing it to be the Book of Allah (SWT), reading it, understanding it, and acting upon its teachings, another duty which rests upon every Muslim and which he must discharge according to his strength and ability, is that he must communicate its teachings to others.

For "communicating the message of the Qur'an to the people," the appropriate and comprehensive terms is *tableegh*. Teaching the Qur'an to others is also a form of *tableegh*. Similarly, explaining the meanings of the Qur'an to the people is *tableegh* at a higher plane.

In order to understand the importance of this duty that we owe to the Qur'an, let us consider the purpose for which the Holy Book was revealed. It has been stated by the Qur'an itself in the following words:

> This (Qur'an) is a message to the people, in order that they may be warned thereby…. (Ibrahim 14:52)

Again, it declares the basic objective of its being revealed to the Holy Prophet (SAW) in *ayah* 19 of Surah Al-An'am:

> Say (O Muhammad!): "…and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn you therewith and whomsoever it may reach…." (Al-An'am 6:19)

The Qur'an also announces in clear-cut words that it was the foremost duty of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to communicate the message of the Qur'an to mankind with utmost faithfulness, and that the slightest negligence in the fulfillment of this duty would be a serious dereliction of his prophetic mission. Hence the peremptory command in Surah Al-Ma'idah:

> O Messenger! Proclaim that which has been sent down to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you have not conveyed his message…. (Al-Ma'idah 5:67)

In perfect obedience to this command, the Holy Prophet (SAW), right from the moment he received the first revelation to the last minute of his earthly life, for full 23 years, bore untold hardships and waged a ceaseless struggle to fulfill the momentous duty entrusted to him. Although this long and heroic struggle passed through many phases and he had to play different roles for the fulfillment of his mission, still the Qur'an was, all along, the pivotal point of all his activities. He was constantly occupied with reciting the Qur'an, explaining its meanings and communicating its message to the people, thereby enlightening their minds and purifying their souls. The Qur'an describes the basic methodology of the Holy Prophet (SAW) by means of four highly significant terms, which are: recitation of Divine *ayaat*, purification of souls, instructions regarding the law, and inculcation of wisdom. These terms appear at four different places in the Qur'an:

> …he (the Messenger) recites to them His *ayaat* (the Qur'anic verses), purifies them, and instructs them in *kitab* (the law) and wisdom…. (Aal Imran 3:164 & Al-Jumu'ah 62:2)

Obviously, these words indicate the same technique as we have suggested in the foregoing pages while explaining the right method of bringing about the Islamic Revolution in our society. In short, pursuing this method with extraordinary courage and perseverance for 23 years, the Holy Prophet (SAW) acquitted himself admirably and communicated Allah's Message to mankind. He also sought the cooperation of his devoted Companions (RAA) for the completion of his mission, exhorting them to:

> Convey from me to the people even if it be a single *ayah*. (Narrated by Bukhari)

Having accomplished his mission, the Holy Prophet (SAW) transferred the responsibility of propagating the message of the Qur'an in the future to his *Ummah*. Having obtained more than once the testimony of the people to the effect that he had, indeed, successfully conveyed Allah's Message to them, the Prophet (SAW), in his historic address to a gathering of 125 thousand Companions (RAA) on the occasion of the last pilgrimage, issued the abiding instructions:

> Those who are present should convey (Allah's Message) to those who are not. (Narrated by Bukhari)

Thus the duty of spreading the message of the Qur'an to every nook and corner of the world was devolved on the shoulders of the *Ummah* for all time to come, and the *Ummah* as a whole shall be answerable to the Almighty with regard to this arduous duty. As the *Ummah* consists of the individuals, every individual is responsible for the discharge of this duty: men of learning according to their knowledge and ability and common people according to their means and capability.

The words of the Holy Prophet (SAW) "Convey from me to the people though it be a single *ayah*" prove it beyond any shadow of doubt that no individual is exempt from this duty. If a person can only read the Arabic text of the Qur'an, he should teach others to do so; one who has memorized the whole Qur'an should help others in memorizing it; one who can translate the text, should do so for others; and one who can comprehend its meaning should explain and interpret it to others. If a person understands the meaning of a single Surah and explains the same to others, and if he knows only a single *ayah* and teaches it to others, he will be discharging the duty of communicating the Qur'an; but the collective duty of the *Ummah* in this connection will not be fulfilled unless the Qur'an, both its text and its message, is propagated everywhere, throughout the length and breadth of the world.

Unfortunately, under the present conditions, this universal proclamation of Allah's Message, which is expected of the Muslim *Ummah*, seems to be a far cry or an unattainable ideal, because things have come to such a pass that the *Ummah* to whom this great and honorific duty was assigned has itself grown ignorant of the Qur'an. Today, the Muslim *Ummah* itself needs to be instructed in the Book of Allah (SWT) which it has practically forsaken. Hence what is urgently required under the present situation is that a movement for learning and teaching the Qur'an should be launched among the Muslims themselves so that they may develop a fresh attitude of devotion to, and interest in the study of the Qur'an. May Allah (SWT) grant us the strength to carry out this task. Ameen!

As it has been pointed out in the beginning of this discussion, a higher form of *tableegh* (communication) is *tabyeen* (exposition). The message of the Qur'an is not only to be communicated but its meanings are also to be explained and interpreted to the people. In Qur'anic terminology, this has been called *tabyeen*, Hence *tableegh* and *tabyeen* appear together in the title of this section. It will be seen that the exposition of the Qur'an demands that one who undertakes this task should talk to his audience at their own level so that the truths of the Qur'an are brought home to them and, secondly, explain to them the implications and arguments of different *ayahs* and Surahs.

It will be noted that the Qur'an calls itself *Bayan* (a plain statement).

> This is a plain statement to mankind, a guidance and instruction to those who are God-conscious…. (Aal Imran 3:138)

The Qur'an frequently characterizes itself as *mubeen* (clear), and its *ayaat* as *bayyinat* and *mubayyinat* (clear signs or manifestations). It also points out that to explain and interpret the Divine Scriptures is the responsibility of the prophets and their followers to whom these are vouchsafed. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is addressed on this point in the following words:

> …and We sent down unto you (O Muhammad!) the Reminder, that you may explain clearly to mankind what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought. (Al-Nahl 16:44)

It has been stated about the Jews and Christians that they were bound by a covenant to explain the Book of Allah (SWT) to mankind:

> And (remember) when Allah took a covenant from the People of the Book to make it (the Revelation) known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it…. (Aal Imran 3:187)

When they did not fulfill this covenant and, on the contrary, tried to conceal the truth, they were accursed:

> Verily, those who conceal the clear signs We have sent down, and the guidance after We have made it clear for the people in the Book, on them shall be Allah's Curse and the curse of those entitled to curse. (Al-Baqarah 2:159)

It may be noted that *tabyeen* has different forms. Its simplest form consists in expressing the plain meanings of the Qur'an in an easy, straightforward manner in the common language of the people. Naturally, the medium to be used for explaining the Qur'an to the people has to be their own language.

> And We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people, in order to make things clear to them…. (Ibrahim 14:4)

Tabyeen in its highest form is rather a job with a challenge. One who resolves upon fulfilling his duty of explaining the Qur'an in this sense of the term will not merely translate its text, but he will try to unfold the knowledge and wisdom contained in this great Book and bring out the implied meanings and subtle significance of its *ayaat* and Surahs. He will explain the mode of inference and deduction adopted by the Qur'an and repudiate effectively, with the help of Qur'anic arguments, the false notions and misleading views prevalent among the people. He will endeavor to establish the truth of the Qur'an and its teachings, reasoning convincingly at the highest plane of thought accessible to the people in a particular age according to its intellectual advancement. Regarding the question as to how can we discharge our responsibility of explaining the Qur'an and bringing its message home to the people, we can say that for *tabyeen* in its simplest form we should publish translations and commentaries of the Holy Book in all the important languages of the world and circulate them widely. So far as our obligation for *tabyeen* in its highest form is concerned, it cannot be properly and adequately discharged, as we have already suggested, unless we set up all over the Muslim world a network of such universities and academies as may concentrate on Qur'anic study and research, assigning it the central place in the scheme of their disciplines. Through standard institutions of this type we shall be able to explain the teachings of the Qur'an to the people of the modern world.

A Direct Word with the Reader

In this booklet, I have given you an idea of the duties which we as Muslims owe to the Qur'an. In the end, I must urge you with all the emphasis at my command to make an earnest effort to discharge these duties with utmost care. We are the most fortunate people in the world in the sense that we possess the Book of Allah (SWT) perfectly intact in its original form. Whereas it is a cause of great honor for us, it also lays upon us a heavy responsibility. Prior to the advent of Islam, the Israelites were the custodians of Allah's Book, but when they did not discharge their responsibilities and proved unworthy of the honor conferred upon them, Almighty Allah (SWT) raised a new *Ummah* (i.e., the Muslims) and vouchsafed His Book to them in the form of the Qur'an. In Surah Al-Jumu'ah we have a similitude of the people who did not fulfill the duties that devolved upon them as custodians of Allah's Book.

> This similitude of those who were charged with the (obligation of) Torah, but who subsequently failed in this (obligation) is that of a donkey which carries huge volumes... (Al-Jumu'ah 62:5)

In the subsequent part of the *ayah*, it has been plainly stated that their failure to discharge their obligations towards their Holy Book is tantamount to their denying its truth:

> …How bad is the similitude of people who deny the *ayaat* of Allah…. (Al-Jumu 'ah 62:5)

The *ayah* ends in the categorical declaration that it is not in Allah's nature to grant guidance to such people:

> …and Allah guides not the people who are wrongdoers. (Al-Jumu'ah 62:5)

God forbid that you or I be included among the people who are guilty of denying and rejecting the Book of Allah (SWT) by their negligence in the discharge of their obligations towards it and thus incur Allah's wrath. I most earnestly pray that Allah (SWT) may make us custodians of the Qur'an in the real sense of the term, and enable us to fulfill our duties towards it in the best way, which may enable us to win His good pleasure.

We should remember the time when Allah's Messenger (SAW) will appear as a prosecution witness in the Court of the Almighty and charge his people with forsaking the Qur'an:

> And the Messenger will say: "O my Lord! Verily my people deserted this Qur'an. (Al-Furqan 25:30)

Although in this *ayah* the words "my people" refer to the unbelievers who turned a deaf ear to the Qur'an and treated it with disdain, nevertheless it applies with equal cogency to people like us who believe in the Qur'an but have practically rejected it as a thing of least moment or consequence.

Let me quote for your what Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani has to say on this point.

> Although the *ayah* really refers to the conduct of the unbelievers, yet (it has a wider application, and) all those who do not confirm the truth of the Qur'an (by actually following its teachings in their life), do not ponder over its meanings, do not recite it properly, do not try to learn its correct reading; but indulge in all sorts of vain and frivolous pursuits turning their back upon it (also come under its purview and) would be considered guilty of abandonment of the Qur'an.[18]

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[18] By a strange coincidence that indicates the Maulana's spiritual and intellectual kinship with the Holy Prophet (SAW), we have a similar wording in a tradition which runs as follow:

> "O people of the Qur'an! Do not make the Qur'an a pillow (that you may sleep over it and put it behind your back). You should rather recite it day and night; propagate it (all over the world), read it in a pleasing voice; ponder over its meaning so that you may prosper."

Let me once again seek Almighty's protection against our being included among such people, and conclude my discourse with the following prayer which is generally offered on completing the recitation of the whole Qur'an but which, I believe, should frequently be offered so that Allah (SWT) may grant us strength to fulfill the duties we owe to His Book.

> O my Lord! Be merciful to us because of (our link) with the Qur'an; make it for us a leader, (and a source of) light, guidance, and mercy, cause us to recall from it what we have failed to understand; give us strength to recite it day and night; and make it a plea for our salvation, O Lord of the worlds. Ameen!

Let me in the end present you the gift of a prayer which appears in a tradition narrated by Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RAA). It is actually a prayer which the Holy Prophet (SAW) prescribed for his Companions (RAA) as a remedy for cares and worries. But it is a splendid supplication that shows the attitude of an ideal bondsman towards his Master and describes the curative effect of the Qur'an on the human soul. It also indicates how deep a devotion the Holy Prophet (SAW) had for the Qur'an and in how high an esteem he held it. The prayer runs as follows:

> O Allah! Verily I am Your bondsman, the son of Your bondsman, and the son of Your bondsmaid. I am under Your Control. My fore-lock is in Your Hand. Your decision is to be executed about me, and just shall be Your judgment in my case. I beg You — addressing You with all those names that You have named Yourself with, or that You have taught any of Your creatures, or that You have revealed in Your Book, or that You have preferred to keep secret in the realm of the Unseen — to make the Qur'an a source of delight for my heart and of light for my breast, and an instrument of dispelling my grief, and driving away my cares and worries. Accept this prayer of mine, O Lord of the Words!

What a noble title has been conferred upon us! How succinct the tradition that so beautifully sums up the duties that devolve upon us as "People of the Qur'an"! In fact, this masterpiece of conciseness is hundred times more expressive than any number of our long, pompous speeches on the subject. True was the claim of the Holy Prophet (SAW) that he was gifted with the power of laconic speech.